

Message Text

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ACTION SS-20

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK IMMEDIATE

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2280

S E C R E T SAIGON 2847

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VS

SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY RUSH: TALKING POINTS (VIETNAM)

1. FOLLOWING ARE TALKING POINTS FOR DPTY SECTY RUSH DURING HIS CALLS ON FONMIN YUONG VAN BAC, PRIME MINISTER TRAN THIEN KHIEM, AND PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU. A TALKING POINT ON THE ECONOMIC SITUATION WILL BE TRANSMITTED SEPTTEL.

2. IMPROVED GVN DIPLOMATIC POSTURE (DEPSEC MIGHT RAISE)

A. YOU MIGHT WISH TO EXPRESS OUR ADMIRATION FOR THE NEW VIGOR IN THE RVN DIPLOMATIC POSTURE. WE ARE DELIGHTED AT THE RECENT SUCCESS IN KEEPING THE "PRG" OUT OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON LAWS OF WAR. WE ARE HAPPY TO HEAR THAT A NUMBER OF VACANT AMBASSADORIAL POSTS WILL SOON BE FILLED AND THAT THE NUMBER OF GVN EMBASSIES IS EXPANDING.

B. WE ALSO WERE MOST PLEASED TO LEARN OF THE GVN'S INITIATIVES FOR ELECTIONS, IN PARIS, AND HERE, FOR A LIMITED CEASE-FIRE. THESE MOVES EMBARRASS THE COMMUNISTS AND ENHANCE THE GVN'S IMAGE.

C. YOU MIGHT ALSO POINT TO THE NEED FOR THE GVN TO BE ALERT TO COMMUNIST ATTEMPTS TO GAIN STATUS FOR THE "PRG" AT THE FORTHCOMING SPECIAL UNGA SESSION, WHO MEETING, AND LAW OF SEA CONFERENCE.

D. BACKGROUND: THE GVN IS GRADUALLY IMPROVING ITS ABILITY

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TO COUNTER THE COMMUNIST DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE. THE NEW FONMIN,

VUONG VAN BAC, HAS PROVED TO BE EXTREMELY ACTIVE IN TELLING THE GVN STORY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, OFTEN DOING SO IN PERSON IN THE COURSE OF EXTENDED TRIPS ABROAD, AND THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS SHOWN ITSELF MORE ACTIVE IN MAKING STRONG PITCHES FOR SUPPORT TO FOREIGN GOVTS. THE GVN DELEGATION AT THE LAWS OF WAR CONFERENCE IN GENEVA WON HIGH PRAISE FROM GEORGE ALDRICH FOR ITS PERFORMANCE ON THE ISSUE OF AN INVITATION TO THE "PRG" THE GVN HAS RECENTLY ESTABLISHED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA AND CHILE. IT IS HOPING ALSO TO OPEN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH VENEZUELA.

THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS ALSO BEEN VERY ACTIVE IN EXPOSING -- BY PUBLIC STATEMENT AND DIPLOMATIC NOTE -- THE CONTINUING COMMUNIST

VIOLATIONS OF THE CEASEFIRE AND THE PARIS AGREEMENT.

3. PRISONER RELEASES (DEP SEC MIGHT RAISE)

A. THE PRISONER RELEASES PROVIDED FOR IN THE PARIS AGREEMENT WERE RESUMED ON FEBRUARY 8 AND WILL BE COMPLETED ON MARCH 6. DURING THIS FINAL PHASE OF RELEASES, THE GVN RELEASED TO THE COMMUNISTS 3,506 CIVILIAN DETAINEES AND 33 POW'S AND RECEIVED IN RETURN 634 MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PRISONERS FROM THE COMMUNISTS. IN EARLIER RELEASES LAST SPRING AND SUMMER, THE GVN RELINQUISHED NEARLY 27,000 POW'S AND 1,575 CIVILIAN DETAINEES AND RECEIVED BARELY 5,000 POW'S AND ONLY 411 CIVILIANS.

B. YOU MIGHT WISH TO COMPLIMENT THE GVN ON THIS ACCOMPLISHMENT, RECOGNIZING THAT IT WAS NOT AN EASY DECISION TO RESUME THE NUMERICALLY

LOPSIDED RELEASES AFTER THE GVN'S EARLIER DEMONSTRATION OF INTEGRITY AND GOOD FAITH IN RETURNING ALL ITS OWN POW'S HAD FAILED TO GET THE COMMUNISTS TO RETURN MORE OF THE THOUSANDS OF CAPTIVES WHOM THEY STILL DENY HOLDING. WE RECOGNIZE ALSO THAT ONCE THE DECISION WAS MADE,

THE BURDEN OF CARRYING OUT THE RELEASES FELL ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY UPON THE GVN, WHILE THE OTHER SIDE DEVOTED ITS EFFORTS TO DILATORY QUIBBLING AND DISTORTION. WE ANTICIPATE THAT THIS ACCOMPLISHMENT WILL BENEFIT US BOTH BY MAKING IT LESS DIFFICULT TO JUSTIFY BEFORE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL OPINION THE POLITICAL SUPPORT AND MATERIAL ASSISTANCE WHICH WE MUST PROVIDE FOR THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE

PEOPLE'S DEFENSE AGAINST THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AGGRESSOR.

C. UNFORTUNATELY THERE STILL REMAINS THE PERNICIOUS PROPAGANDA
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CONCERNING "POLITICAL PRISONERS." WE HOPE THAT THE GVN WILL SEEK TO FURTHER ENHANCE ITS IMAGE, AND TO FURTHER NEUTRALIZE ITS STILL DANGEROUS CRITICS' MOST EFFECTIVE WEAPON, BY EVEN MORE FORTHRIGHT AND FACTUAL EFFORTS TO REVEAL THE "BIG LIE" PROPAGANDA ON POLITICAL PRISONERS FOR WHAT IT IS -- A CONSCIOUS CAMPAIGN BY THE GVN'S ENEMIES, STRONGLY SUPPORTED BY HANOI, TO DENY IT THE MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE IT NEEDS.

4. ASSURANCE OF CONTINUED US SUPPORT (DEP SEC MIGHT RAISE)

A. WE MUST ASSURE THE GVN OF THE STRENGTH AND CONSTANCY OF OUR COMMITMENT TO A FREE AND INDEPENDENT SOUTH VIETNAM. INFORMED GVN LEADERS

ARE AWARE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN CONDUCTED BY THE COMMUNISTS, AND JOINED IN BY ANTI-VIETNAM MOVEMENTS AROUND THE WORLD, TO ERODE SUPPORT FOR THE RVN. THEY ARE ALSO AWARE OF OUR PARTICULAR PROBLEMS WITH A GROWING LACK OF US PUBLIC INTEREST IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE RESULTANT PROBLEMS WE FACE IN CONGRESS IN OBTAINING SUPPORT. WE MUST ASSURE THE GVN THAT WE WILL DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO SUPPORT THE RVN'S NEEDS.

B. BACKGROUND: THE NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES ARE CONTINUING THEIR YEAR-LONG MILITARY BUILD-UP WITHIN SOUTH VIETNAM AND ALONG ITS BORDERS. THE THREAT OF A LARGE-SCALE MILITARY OFFENSIVE BY NORTH VIETNAM REMAINS VERY HIGH; HOWEVER IT SEEMS THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY PLANS MAY NOT INCLUDE A MAJOR OFFENSIVE WITHIN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. NORTH VIETNAM HOLDS TO ITS GOAL OF CONQUERING SOUTH VIETNAM BY FORCE; IT HAS MERELY DEFERRED ITS PLANNED OFFENSIVE UNTIL THE GVN GROWS WEAKER, EITHER DUE TO DOMESTIC CHAOS, WHETHER POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC, OR TO REDUCED SUPPORT FOR THE RVN IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA, PARTICULARLY BY THE US.

C. DURING THE INITIAL STAGES OF THE ENEMY BUILD-UP, WHEN A MAJOR NVA OFFENSIVE APPEARED MORE IMMINENT, MANY SOUTH VIETNAMESE LACKED CONFIDENCE IN THE ABILITY OF THE RVNAF TO WITHSTAND THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WITHOUT THE REINTRODUCTION OF US AIR SUPPORT. AS THE YEAR WORE ON AND RVNAF BEGAN TO IMPROVE, SOUTH VIETNAMESE BEGAN TO GAIN CONFIDENCE IN THEIR SELF-DEFENSE CAPABILITY AND THE QUESTION OF US AID SUPPORT NOW SELDOM ARISES. THE PUBLIC DEBATE IN THE US OVER ASSISTANCE, BOTH ECONOMIC AND MILITARY, TO SOUTH VIETNAM DOES, HOWEVER, RAISE SOME DOUBTS IN THE MINDS OF INFORMED GVN AND RVNAF LEADERS.

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5. DISPUTE OVER THE PARACELS AND SPRATLYS (THE GVN MAY RAISE)

A. THE GVN UNDERSTANDS THAT WE TAKE NO POSITION ON THE CONFLICTING CLAIMS TO THESE TWO GROUPS OF ISLANDS. FOLLOWING EXPULSION OF THEIR FORCES FROM THE PARACELS BY THE CHINESE, THE GVN HAS BEEN SEEKING WAYS

TO FIND SATISFACTION THROUGH THE UN, SEATO, THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OR THIRD PARTY ARBITRATION. WHILE THEY ARE AWARE THAT THEY HAVE LITTLE

HOPE OF WINNING ANY SUPPORT FROM EITHER THE UN OR SEATO, THEY ARE ACTIVELY CONSIDERING TAKING THE MATTER TO THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OR SUBMITTING IT TO ARBITRATION. WE HAVE NOT DISCOURAGED THEM FROM TAKING THIS COURSE BECAUSE, WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVE ANY SUCCESS, IT IS IN THEIR INTEREST TO BE SEEN PUBLICLY AS SEEKING PEACEFUL, LEGAL RESOLUTION OF THEIR DISPUTE WITH PEKING. THE FONMIN MAY MENTION THIS MATTER TO YOU AND ASK YOUR ADVICE.

B. BACKGROUND ON THE SITUATION IN THE SPRATLYS: THE PARACELS AFFAIR IMMEDIATELY RAISED GVN CONCERN THAT THE PRC MIGHT TAKE SIMILAR ACTION IN THE SPRATLYS. THE GVN AT THE TIME HAD FORCES ON ONLY ONE OF THE SPRATLY ISLANDS; SINCE THE END OF JANUARY IT HAS PUT FORCES ON SEVERAL OTHER ISLANDS IN ORDER TO PREEMPT A POSSIBLE CHINESE MOVE. THE PRC THREAT TO THE SPRATLYS IS OF COURSE FAR LESS SERIOUS THAN IN THE CASE OF THE PARACELS. THE SPRATLYS ARE MUCH FURTHER FROM THE CHINESE MAINLAND; AND THEY ARE CLAIMED BY THE PHILIPPINES AND THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA AS WELL AS THE GVN -- MAKING THEM FAR MORE OF A PROBLEM FROM PEKING'S POINT OF VIEW. PEKING'S RECENT RELEASE OF ALL THE VIETNAMESE CAPTURED DURING THE PARACELS BATTLE IS AN INDICATION THAT PEKING AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING IS TAKING A RELAXED VIEW OF THE GVN'S "OCCUPATION" OF ISLANDS IN THE SPRATLYS.

IN THE CONTEXT OF GVN RELATIONS WITH NORTH VIETNAM, THE PARACELS AND SPRATLYS HAVE IMPORTANT POLITICAL MEANING. THE SPECTACLE OF THE GVN'S STOUTLY DEFENDING VIETNAMESE NATIONAL INTERESTS AGAINST VIETNAM'S TRADITIONAL ENEMY, CHINA, IS PROFOUNDLY DISCOMFORTING TO HANOI. BY LOUDLY BROADCASTING ITS STRONG POSITION ON THE PARACELS AND SPRATLYS THE GVN IN EFFECT IS TAUNTING HANOI -- "WHO'S THE PUPPET NOW?" THE OVERALL EFFECT STRENGTHENS THE GVN'S POLITICAL POSITION DOMESTICALLY AND GIVES THE GVN AN IMPORTANT WEAPON IN ITS POLITICAL CONTEST WITH THE NORTH COMMUNISTS.

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